

## Newspaper Headings as a Means of Presenting Priority and Secondary Information

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### ABSTRACT

This study considers the possibility of using headings in periodicals as a functional mechanism for influencing the readers, which has corresponding goals and tasks. The study offers a detailed characterization of headings not as a unit of publishing and printing design, but as a conceptual and informational element in journalistic texts. Therefore, headings are studied in close relation to publications and their influence on the recipient. The study determines the features of the headings' information load, their design and conceptual-semantic direction. The most important functions of newspaper headings were analyzed. The reasons for considering them both as an architectonic structure that predetermines and affects the information content of the entire newspaper and as an individual productive unit that forms its own conceptual load and determines the perceptual reserve of the newspaper were outlined and substantiated. The key characteristics that allow determining the level of information presented in newspaper headings were described - they play the main and secondary role in the conveyance of notions and facts that are important to the recipient. The influence of headings on the readability of the periodical and its competitiveness in the formation of the public opinion was noted.

### KEYWORDS

Periodical information, readers choice, headline complex, printed media, priority of publication

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## Introduction

The current stage of development and establishment of “press linguistics” generates new ways of analyzing important phenomena in the structuring and design of mass media (Ramge & Schuster, 2013). Despite the increasing effect of television and the Internet on the general public, newspapers remain a powerful indicator of the public opinion. Therefore, the selection of materials for publication and the well-tuned presentation of said materials is of great importance (Kurz et al., 2013).

When dealing with a considerable number of newspapers with different subjects, volumes, and design, the reader chooses not only the ones that have interesting content, but also the ones that the reader likes for the arrangement of the material and the amount of additional information (headings, headlines, pull quotes, subheadings, images, etc.) (Ptashnyk, 2014). It is necessary to

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compose the newspaper properly to emphasize its headings, which are the second object that the recipient notices after the title of the newspaper (Rath, 2015). With that, modern journalism has yet to solve the problem of systematic organization and regularities of distribution of external and internal informational elements in newspapers.

The structuring and effective design of headings, notwithstanding the linguistic means of their expression on the lexical-semantic, expressive-emotional, and esthetic level, has high potential for analysis and research (Lenk & Chesterman, 2015a). Therefore, the relevance of the study is determined by the need to investigate the theories regarding the design of printed periodicals in the context of presentation of priority and secondary information and to outline the parameters that determine the main factors of expressiveness of headings and their influence on the reader.

The attempt made in this study to understand and investigate the role of newspaper headings as a conceptual and informational element of varying configuration will expand the scientific understanding of journalistic tools in the field of mass information influence. This study considers headings as not only an element of newspaper design, but also as a unit of a holistic interconnected hierarchic system with a set of functions, which is subject to the headline complex. The key criteria used in this study to analyze newspaper headings may be used to develop a universal scientific concept of the theory of headings, including their informative persuasiveness. This theory may also be used to study headings in online media.

This study considers the heading design of a periodical as a specific area of journalism that activates information exchange and is a tool and a resource for interaction with readers. Therefore, the practical value of this study lies in the possibility of using its findings and conclusions not only in special seminars on the theory of journalism, but also in the effective organization of newspapers with a view to improving their rating and potential to interest readers.

## Literature Review

The headline complex is an interesting research object in the context of many relevant linguistic problems: its structure, syntax composition, functional load, semantics, style, preservation of linguistic means, etc (Voss, 2013; Pilik, 2014). Despite this fact, headings as an important element of this system are understudied in “press linguistics”. They are often analyzed in combination with other headline units without distinguishing their specific features and functions. This issue was covered by V.I. Ilchenko (2002), E.A. Lazareva (2006), D. A. Bowles & D.L. Borden (1997), and others. They investigate the aspects of linguistic analysis of headline elements of newspaper titles and texts, their metaphoric composites, commentary functions, etc.

An in-depth analysis of periodical headings in terms of their design, meaning, and semantic scope can be found in the works of A.E. Milchin (1998), V.V. Popov (1964), V.Ye. Shevchenko (2001) and others. It is worth noting that these researchers identify the concept of “heading” by giving several definitions thereof, describe the main types of headings and prerequisites for their emergence, and position with respect to the text. However, headings in printed media are understudied as a means of influence on the recipient that is in tune for information perception. This issue was partly covered by N.N. Sabyanin

(2013), W. Brand (1991), H.E. Lenk & A. Chesterman (2005a) and others. Researchers investigated the influence of headings on the improvement of the effectiveness of newspapers, which implies that they analyzed the factors of influence on the readers. However, headings as a means of presenting the priority and secondary information to the reader have yet to be studied in a special research.

Latest studies in the field of mass media show that with the current unlimited flow of easily accessible information, the attention of the potential twenty-first-century reader is aimed at visual perception and the processing of surface material, including the headline complex that forms the general idea of the text. In this context, headings play an important role of a stimulus-signal capable of either arousing the interest of the reader or failing to do so (Ramge & Schuster, 2013; Staffeldt & Christine, 2013; Oberhauser, 2013).

The established newspaper style illustrates the systematic observation of the functional purpose of heading units.

Publishers of printed press attempt not only to draw the readers' attention by the quality of the graphic design of headings, but also to use their potential as a means of material systematization. The hierarchic heading system organizes the reading process, notifies of the beginning of a new thought, helps to find the necessary material, and indicates the priority or secondary importance of the information (Lenk & Chesterman, 2005b; Hellwig, 1984; Sabyanin, 2013).

The *scientific novelty* of this study lies in the investigation of newspaper headings as an effective means of conveying priority and secondary information, the development of an analytical and conceptual approach to the characterization of the main factors of influence on the recipient, and the comparison of the classification attributes of headings and their informative persuasiveness. It is worth noting that this study investigates headings not as a unit of publishing and printing design, but as a conceptual and informational element in journalistic texts. Therefore, the description of headings is closely related to the subject of publications and their influence on the recipient. This is a new area in the study of periodicals that involves the psychological and linguistic factor – the ability to manipulate the attention of potential readers. In addition, the conducted analysis enables testing the classification potential of headings, which was described in scientific literature.

### ***Aim of the Study***

The *purpose of the study* is to analyze comprehensively the organization and regularities of distribution of newspaper headings as a means of presenting priority and secondary information.

### ***Research questions***

What are the main functional characteristics of newspaper headlines?

### ***Methods***

A set of methods and techniques for interpreting newspaper headings was used to achieve the goals of this study. The main method was *content analysis*, the main function of which in this research was diagnostic: to reconstruct the overall picture of the information conveyed in headings, to outline important

elements of description and to decipher them, based on the systems analysis of the specificity of newspaper design.

The study also used the *conceptual* and *structural* analysis, which enabled analyzing the subjects of headings under consideration and their perceptual load on the recipient. The method of *optimal configuration of units* of a newspaper complex was used to investigate headings as an important element of the architectonic organization of the newspaper. This method determined the place and ideological orientation of headings in the hierarchic system of the printed material and outlined the existing interconnection between the headlines and their semantic scope.

The *descriptive method*, which includes *observation*, *comparison*, *generalization*, and *classification*, investigates the professional design of newspaper headings and the effectiveness of the influence of psychological and emotional factors on the quality of the influence of information on the reader. The *systems* and *generalization* methods were used to highlight the key characteristics of headings that enable identifying the presented information in terms of its priority or secondary nature, to systematize the studied material, and to draw appropriate conclusions.

### Data, Analysis, and Results

The informational content of newspaper headings has a dual function: on the one hand, it is an architectonic structure that defines and affects the informational content of the entire newspaper; on the other hand, it forms an individual conceptual load and determines the perceptual level of understanding of the information by the readers. The heading system of periodicals, including newspapers, differs from that of books not only in the composition of elements, but also in their functions. A strict observation of the functional purpose and appropriate design of heading units expresses the style of the newspaper.

Proper construction of the heading system expresses the creative and compositional potential of the periodical and enhances the readability of the material and its communicative effect. Headings allow showing the priority of information, since they structure it by levels and convey the level of subject affinity towards the recipient. This ability directly results from the specific and conceptual characteristics of headings and their functional load. For instance, S.V. Partyko classifies headings by the level of conveyance of the compositional unit theme: thematic, semi-mute, and mute. Thematic headings convey the subject of the compositional unit; semi-mute headings only show the name of the level to which a unit belongs and its index number; mute headings only use special means (imposition, empty lines, asterisks, etc.) to show the presence of a heading in this position (Partyko, 2016). Thematic headings, as the most informative ones, have an advantage in the presentation of important information. Such headings inform the reader either of the topic of the material on an entire newspaper page or of the nature of its interpretation and give the reader a preliminary impression of the text.

V.F. Ivanov (2000) suggests classifying headings by temporality: regular, temporary, and episodic. Regular headings function in newspapers continuously for a long time. Temporary headings are required only for a certain time, since they are related to a political or economic campaign or are of seasonal nature.

Temporary headings emerge only when a campaign launches and disappear once the campaign ends. Episodic headings specify the nature of certain publications, thus drawing the reader's attention to the issue addressed in the newspaper. Such headings usually appear only once in one issue of the newspaper. It is worth noting that each of these headings has a corresponding emotional load on the recipient and thus enables manipulating informational attention.

Regular headings are usually intended for regular readers that search for information according to an established priority algorithm. They most frequently perform the function of headlines, located at the top of the page, thus determining the area and nature of the material on a specific page. Such super-headings structure the material of an issue, help to find necessary information quickly, and present the block of materials to which the newspaper wishes to draw attention.

Modern periodicals often include regular headings that inform of the political, economic, and cultural life in the country and the world. For instance, the traditional News heading is a regular heading in newspapers. This heading often is the largest one in the newspaper. It performs such typical functions as to inform of the events and get readers acquainted with information while observing the presentation format.

Such regular newspaper headings as Health, Economy, Sports, Politics, International Affairs, etc. generalize and specify the subject of the presented materials. They help the readers to navigate in the large amount of information and to establish their own priority in the processing of the material. This form of headings familiarizes the readers with a large volume of publications of various nature. They can be purely informative messages, ratings and results, reviews, and interesting studies.

A communicative platform where everybody may exchange opinions is provided by the traditional newspaper section that presents the correspondence with readers (for instance, Mail or Discussion). It creates an important emotional environment of cooperation with the recipients. Readers may be interested in the theoretical answers and practical advice of famous experts.

The analysis of newspaper material found a tendency of increasing the number of regular religious and educational headings (for instance, Culture News). Modern newspapers consider it necessary to educate their recipients, improve the effectiveness of printed media, and expand the horizons and knowledge, which is an objective need of a concrete audience. Sometimes periodicals use introductory headings for this purpose by drawing attention to historic events, dates or big national holidays (for instance, Glory to the Defenders of the Fatherland).

These headings are general and may be used in any periodical regardless of its geography, concept or subject area. Other headings are monopolistic – they are used only in a certain newspaper and gravitate toward geographic location or the specific subject area (for instance, religious periodicals may have monopolistic headings The Bells Proclaim, The Prayer Brings Salvation, etc.). It is worth noting that monopolistic headings play more important a role than general ones, since they are intended for the regular reader. They form the image of the newspaper through the nomination and generalization of priority information.

The appearance of a new heading (temporary or episodic) usually heightens the interest of new readers and counts on the top priority of the presented information. This shifts priority from the regular heading to the new one. Printed media often use temporary headings when a political election campaign is launched (for instance, *Our Choice*). They appear in newspapers at certain intervals: once per week, once per two weeks, etc. Episodic (one-time) headings are used to emphasize certain relevant information (for instance, about a scientific conference, festival, etc.).

In order to understand the priority of information presented in headings, it is important to consider the classification offered K.S. Serazhim (2008). The researcher suggests dividing headings into thematic and auxiliary ones. Thematic headings determine the direction and subject of the newspaper material or, sometimes, the opinion of the author or the editorial board of this or that problem. They are intended to convey the priority and significant material in the newspaper. Auxiliary headings contain secondary information: 1) identify the genre of the material (for instance, *Interview*, *Report*, etc.); 2) identify the source of information (for instance, *From Our Own Reporter*); 3) specify the nature of the target audience (for instance, *Tips for Fishers*); 4) specify the time of events (for instance, *This Morning*); 5) specify the region the paper is writing about (for instance, *Abroad*); 6) inform of the forms and methods of editorial work (for instance, *The Letter Called for a Journey*); 7) provide an extensive characterization of publications by uniting two or more attributes of previous types (for instance, specify the genre and source of information – *Letters from Our Readers*).

As a means of representing important information, the heading acts in the presence of effective content: lexical expressiveness, logical structure, and original imagery. These criteria determine the constructive effect on readers who perceive the content of headings through their linguistic design.

By interacting with other elements of the headline complex, headings segment the content and meet the communicative needs of the recipient. They stimulate the readers' attention by simultaneously performing an informative-guiding and graphical-distinguishing function, informing of the presence of additional text. The verbal design of headings enables making the first prediction regarding the material. Therefore, the authors attempt to make the headings interesting and attractive so as to encourage the reader to perceive the entire text. This involves the advertising and expressive function, aimed at optimizing the perception of the content. The heading should count on the subsequent stage involving the attentive reading of the material.

Consider the main criteria of appropriate verbal design of headings. A heading unit should consist of two-six words with appropriate emotive coloring. Repeating linguistic segments is unacceptable. In terms of headlines, this action may be reasonable to stimulate the readers' attention; however, at the heading level, duplication is a sign of unprofessionalism, rather than of conceptuality in the presentation of newspaper information.

There are many ways of lexical actualization of newspaper titles. Journalists can use various linguistic tools, with regard to expedience and expressivity, since advertising and encouraging content is added to the informational content. With that, the syntax level of their design is important. Therefore, since the main purpose of the heading is the emotional and cognitive



effect, authors use nominative sentences. Thesis-headings are relevant when an educative effect is required. Rhetorical statements and questions are often used for popularization purposes in newspaper materials.

The individual approach of modern media to appropriate linguistic design of headings is an indicator of the effectiveness of this process. Newspapers gradually abandon cliché headings and master the concrete stylistic manner of nomination as an independent means of conveying notions and facts. Therefore, headings require creativity in the linguistic and printing aspects on the part of the authors. The heading should encourage the recipient to read the entire text material.

The next factor that determines the informational potential of headings is their order in the newspaper, which is aimed at enhancing the communicative effect. It implements the logical effective compositional connection, which, in turn, is an indicator of unimpeded and most effective influence on the reader's mind. In this case, headings guide the reader.

The parameters of heading components often are determined by the format and style of the printed matter. For instance, weekly periodicals contain significantly more analytical materials than daily newspapers. Information that is important to the audience is located in small announcement headings on the front page. In certain cases, publishers use so-called banner headlines, when the title of the priority information runs across the entire width of the page and covers other thematic publications. In terms of its properties, this heading may be called a super-heading, which is an analogue of the headline.

The analysis of modern periodicals shows that the nature of newspaper information facilitates the emergence of a large number of headings in proportion to the total volume of newspaper material. Another trend is the accompaniment of a specific publication by its own heading (for instance, the article Giant Mushroom is accompanied by the heading Wonders of Nature). Sometimes one newspaper material can have two headings. The first heading may specify the source of the material, while the second one indicates its temporal characteristics (for instance, Firsthand, Relevant).

Information that is important to the reader may be contained in a collection of short messages located in the sidebar (while the main material is lacking in most cases) and arranged under one heading. Almost all modern newspapers feature announcements on the front page under the heading "Inside", which contains a list of headlines of this particular issue.

It is worth noting that the key factor in successful conveyance of priority material is the expedient and coordinated combination of headings with other headline elements above one text. This facilitates quicker and easier access by the recipient to the offered information. In this case, the strategy of reading segmenting elements of the headline subsystem is important. First the headings and then the other parts of the headline system are perceived as symbol-signals, which facilitates the communicative effect. Then the reader appeals to the functions that they should perform – to guide in the content and, subsequently, in selection. Headlines and subheadlines convey the content of the material, while the heading presents its idea and nature. Hence the growing popularity of headline complexes in modern journalism. A poor combination of its elements not only nullifies the effectiveness of design, but also deprives the reader of the minimum information that arouses interest in the text. Illogicality, athematic

forms, and content duplication are unacceptable at the junction of headings and headlines.

The common feature of mass media is that the verbal function of headings is enhanced by the graphic design that aims to influence the reader visually. Cutting-edge printing technologies enable making the newspaper more convenient in terms of reader perception. This is facilitated by the systematic use of architectonic elements. Means of heading design convey the priority of the presented information. Newspapers often use the same font and size of type to distinguish headings. Different design of the key and auxiliary headings indicates their level of priority. Since this study does not aim to analyze headings at the publishing-printing level, the design of this headline unit is regarded herein as an auxiliary function in the determination of the conceptual and informative potential.

### Discussion and Conclusions

This study does not cover all the problems and does not provide a permanent solution, but rather attempts to solve a small part of the problems facing modern researchers of journalism. This research creates prospects for follow-up studies of the pragmatic features of newspaper headings, for a more in-depth elaboration of the theory of heading design as a means of presenting information to the reader, and for comparative studies of their potential in various media. The conclusions demonstrate the potential capacities of headings as an important unit of the headline complex in newspapers, which were described by V.I. Ilchenko (2002), E.A. Lazareva (2006) and others, based on the classification of V.F. Ivanov (2000). However, the classification attributes of headings were used only as an auxiliary element of the characterization, since their pragmatic aspect in the conveyance of priority and secondary information is a new research object in journalism studies. Therefore, such developments are important from the perspective of expanding the horizons of newspaper design at both the publishing and the conceptual-informational level.

The significance of this study lies in the innovative approach that improves the methodology for analyzing newspaper forms, solves a number of practical problems, including the effective arrangement of information and the ability to popularize it. Its results help to develop relevant theoretical and practical issues of journalism, the general theory of mass media, and to investigate the place and role of design in the effective functioning of periodicals.

This study describes the multidimensional nature of newspaper headings as an effective means of conveying priority and secondary information. The description of headings on the conceptual-informational level found it capable of conveying different degrees of thematic closeness to the recipient. Everything depends on its arrangement and verbal design. It was found that regular headings had an advantage over temporary ones in terms of effective influence on regular readers. At that, episodic headings helped to manipulate the informational attention through the effect of unexpectedness. The comparison of the classification functions of headings (thematic/auxiliary) found that thematic headings were capable of encouraging the audience to read the nominated publications, while auxiliary headings contained additional information about the material, which was not always capable of catching the recipients' attention.



Monopolistic headings are an effective means of conveying specific information intended for a group of recipients.

### Implications and Recommendations

The analysis of the verbal design of headings distinguished the main criteria of their persuasiveness and emotiveness: 1) specific size (2-6 words); 2) avoidance of linguistic segment duplication; 3) expedience, expressiveness, metaphoric nature, aphoristic nature, advertising and promotional nature of lexical content; 4) use of various syntax constructions (nominative, interrogative, and imperative sentences, as well as thesis-sentences); 5) abandonment of cliché headings, individual approach to nomination.

The investigation of the potential of headings from the perspective of its arrangement on newspaper pages enabled determining the mechanisms of influence on the recipient in terms of the conveyance of priority information. Super-headings that run across the entire width of the page and cover other thematic publications have a visual and conceptual advantage. A significant number of materials with their own heading was found in modern newspapers, as well as cases of arrangement of headings within headings. It was found that the graphic design (font, size of type, decorative elements, etc.) performed an auxiliary function in the realization of the conceptual-informational potential of headings.

Further studies should focus on the nature of the functioning of headings as a means of conveying priority information by the example of specific newspapers. In this context, the comparison of the linguistic design of headings in newspapers of different subjects, geographic location, etc. is interesting. It is also expedient to study the informational potential of online media headings, which are a special means of manipulation of the readers' attention, which is why their design has a similar functional load.

### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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